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Ain't I a Woman?

Vol. 2! No. 1

July 30, 1971

A MIDWEST NEWSPAPER OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Published by the aiaw Collective, Iowa City, Iowa

SOJOURNER TRUTH,
"THE LIBYAN SIBYL."

"That man over there say that a woman needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helped me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me a best place ...
And ain't I a women? Look at me. Look at my arm! I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns, and no man could head me...
And ain't I a women? I could work, as much and eat as much as a man when I could get it, and bear the lash as well...
And ain't I a woman? I have borned thirteen children and seen them most all sold off into slavery. And when I cried out with a mother's grief, none but Jesus heard...
And ain't I a woman?"

Sojurner Truth: Speech before the Woman's Rights Convention at Akron, Ohio in 1851.

Ain't I A Woman is published every three weeks by the Angry Independent Amazon Women P.O. Box 1169, Iowa City, Iowa 52240.

We are a collective of nine women functioning as a world wide conspiracy of Radical Lesbians.

If your group wants to receive bundles of AIN'T I A WOMAN?, you can send 15¢ per copy (minimum bundle: 20 copies) in advance.

Dear Everyone,

I've been wanting to write a long letter, but I don't feel like going into the whole thing. My parents are having tons of hassles. I wish I could suggest a reasonable alternative to my Mom. I think she'd split if she had money and wasn't so afraid of being lonely. I've been hardly talking to my Dad- had one horrible discussion about lifestyles. Yuck. I can't believe how much they don't know about me and how much they'll never know. I think before this visit I still had some illusions about getting along with them and their understanding me. I've been doing some private conciousness raising about Jewish family life. Its a super fuck-up. You grow up to respect intelligence (usually the father cuz they talk the best line). You get education up to your ears (which your Mother never had cuz females didn't do that in those days-so somehow she doesn't get quite as much respect as yourfather.) Anyway, I won't go into the whole thing, but the scheme to have Jewish girls love their fathers is a burn (obviously perpetrated by Jewish fathers). My Mom's getting pretty fucked over and I was (much of my life) feeling sorry for my poor Dad.....no more.

Bernadette Devlin is pregnant? What am I going to do?

I miss you all...Love

Sisters,

This'll probably be long and wierd, altho I'm beginning to see that I'm not so wierd as I thought or so unique. Maybe I could make a few bucks printing up my monotonously familiar life story, the majority of other women just signing the dotted line on the bottom because it's their own too.

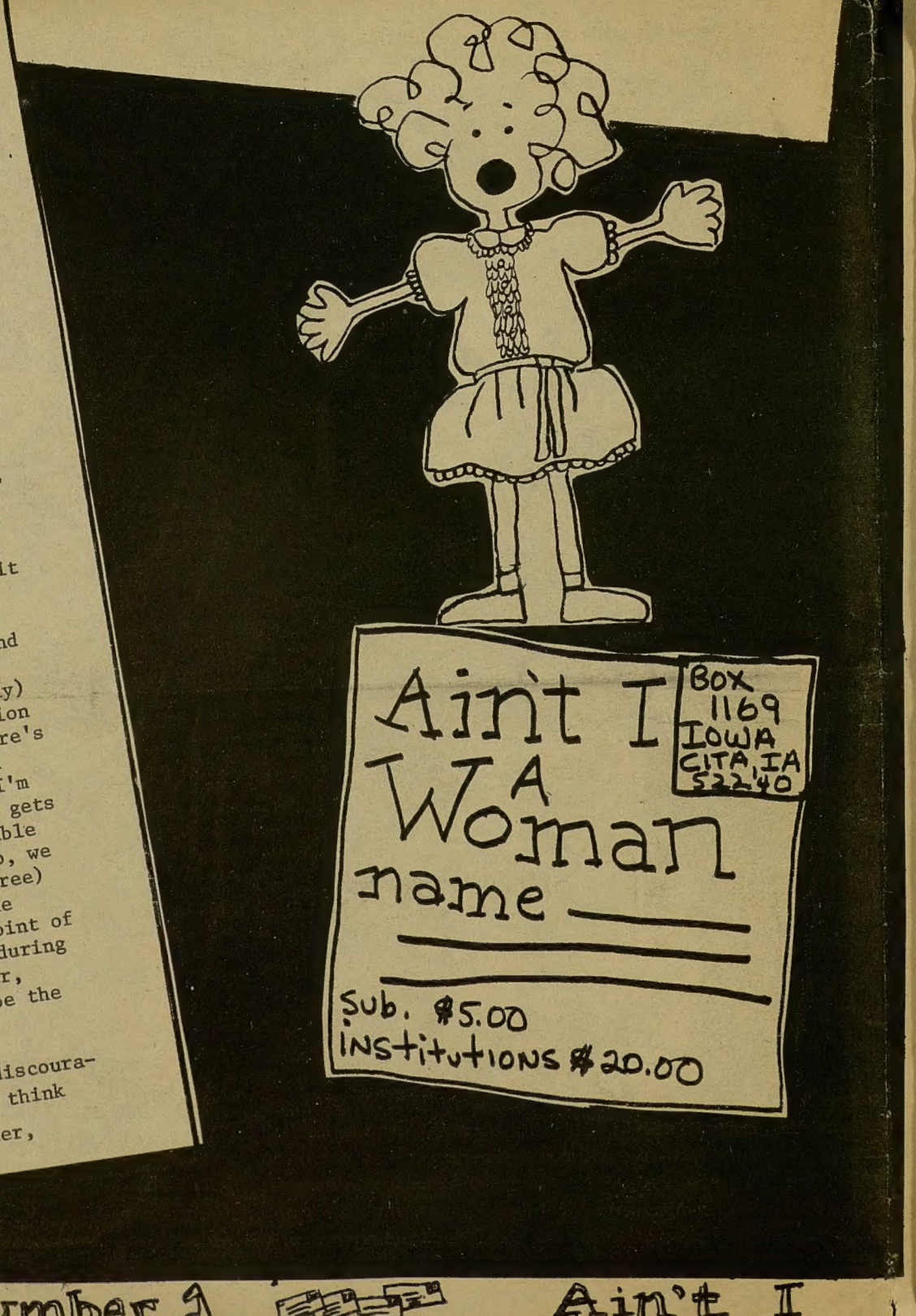
36 years old, married 18 years, 4 kids (female age 13, males age 16, 10, 6), classless daughter of upper-middle class father, classless wife of upper-middle class husband. Loved a woman 16 years, in love with her the last 1/2 of it. Super-guilty feelings on her part, probable rejection of whole thing tomorrow if not today. From me, 2 years growth in awareness of what's going on here, only maybe 1 percent of it having anything to do with children, husbands, self. Correspondence with the editor of THE LADDER and D.O.B. counselor. Seemingly constant over-intense discussions with spouse culminating in promise to let him know by December re: marriage etc.

The subscription was because I believe in you and you may well be me. The enclosed $5 is to ask you if you'll send my subscription 1st class mail in a manila envelope. If you don't want to mess with that, I don't blame you. In that case use the $5 to by grass (BUT ONLY IF LEGAL OF COURSE) and send the remainder of my newspapers to Tricia what's-her-name on Penn. Avenue.

Not that I think sealed envelopes or 1st class mail are sacrosanct....Makes me wonder what dirty, crooked, up-tight, polluted, dangerous, paranoid, angry, miserable America is. Not a democracy, not a constitutional republic--could it be something worse than a dictatorship and if so what in the fuck is it? Whatever it is, being a woman, I didn't think it up. The only thing a woman seems to have come up with independent of childhoood training, programming, is what you 're doing. Your thinking and struggling is exciting and inspiring to me. Hang in there. Wishing I were 10 years younger, less to just be younger than because (justifiably) my age, marital status, number of kids, husbands occupation tend to catagorize me in the heads of younger women. There's probably no way to convince a younger woman that I'm not where you think I am and that I'm going where I figure I'm going. Mostly, when my head is in X place, the question gets to be, from my sisters, who pushed it there. Inconceivable that we could get therewithout shoving from behind? Too, we middle-aged oddities (so okay, there aren't many, I agree) have got to take longer to get anyplace at all from the sheer stress of having to weigh everything from the point of view of those brothers and sisters we've accumulated during our extra years. If the ax falls on my daughter/sister, my friend/lover/sister I'm damned well not going to be the one who cut the string.

Thanks for your time in reading this. When you get discouraged, be aware that you have a broader base than you think you have.

Your sister,



A POEM HELD TOGETHER
BY SHEER EXHAUSTION

I
It begins about friends:
dreams of faces around the bed
every night; arms
stretched out
rocking me through myself.
They whisper "sleep."
They are feathers
slightly flying around
my silence. They are
everywhere.

II
Lonely women
sit on doorsteps.
They carry their houses
inside
where no one comes
to knock.
I used to pretend
I wasn't home.
I never
had anything
to say.

III
I imagine you two
well-formed and full.
I have memorized the distance
between your bodies when filled
with anticipation
of love.
I swell and swim
with your love shared
without me.
I live within
your reach.

IV
I don't want to leave
a word.
I want to sit
and hold me
in my arms.

"Sleep."

The Meaning of Revolution

Things that work should be broken.
Their ability to work is evidence and cause of the
murderous abstraction--the social system.

Things that don't work should be fixed.
Cars, bodies, selves.
That is the love part.

To repair
Men's despair,
Makes the soul whole,
Ready for destruction again.
Fuck you.

Edith Rosenthal
Winter, 1971

from 'Dykes for an Amerikan Revolution'
Easter Day Press 224 'C' Street NE
Washington D.C. 20002

THANKS !!!!!! to JUNE SMITH for her photos on our cover

The Outreach Collective of the Women's Abortion Project wants to exchange information and experience relating to abortion availability and post abortion counselling. They provide abortions (vacuum aspirator method) up to the 12th week of pregnancy. The doctor's fee is $100.00.

The Outreach Collective
c/o Women's Liberation Center
36 W. 22nd St. N.Y. N.Y. 10010
(212) 691-2063 or 691-3396

SPECIAL.....Complete volume of AIAW- issues #2-17 for $2.75
(institutional price is still $20.00)

Here are some more things to read .....

LAVENDER VISION
c/o Media Collective
2 Brookline Street
Cambridge, Mass. 5¢ plus postage

WOMEN'S PAGE
1227 37th Avenue
San Francisco, California 94122
subscription $2.00 for 6 months

NOTES TOWARDS A WOMEN'S ANALYSIS OF CLASS
by Dolores Bargowski
224 'C' Street NE
Washington, D.C. 20002 25¢

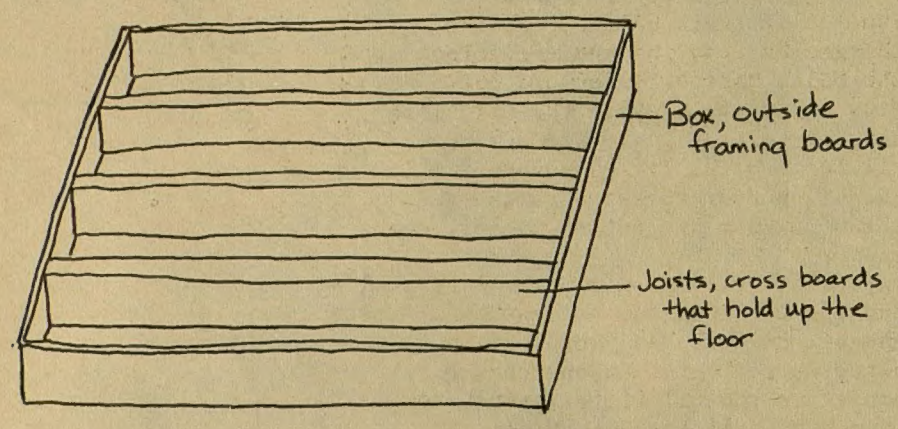
EVERYWOMAN
1043 D West Washington Blvd.
Venice, California 90291
Vol 2 No 10 Issue 21 July 9, 1971
(issue put out by gay women) 35¢

SPECTRE
Box 305
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48107 20¢

IT AIN'T ME BABE
PO Box 6323
Albany, California 94706 25¢

building for the revolution

Monday June 28 - Beginning of my third week as a carpenter's apprentice. Last night, Sunday, before I got to sleep I felt weak, scared, didn't want to go to work. Work was painful at times and I wasn't physically strong enough yet to do all that was required of me. It seemed that I was enduring instead of working. Also it was so frustrating to realize that the men carpenters were stronger than I was and probably always would be. One day Fred, one of the carpenters on our 3 person crew, was gone and Jack, the foreman, had me help him and do Fred's job while we waited for a replacement carpenter. Fred's job entailed going over to the stack of plywood sheets 8'x4'x3/8", spinning them around, picking them up (sometimes it's windy) so that the groove and match are going the right direction and the good side is up, and carrying them over to the panel of the deck and dropping six sheets crosswise over the 2'x8' joists in the panel to which they are to be nailed.



6 sheets per panel, 5 panels per deck, 3 decks each day.

Granted part of my trouble with doing this was not knowing about plywood: which is the good side, which way the groove needs to go, how to wield it. But it's also true that if I had had to do Fred's job all that day, I would have had to admit that I wasn't physically strong enough, yet. I still maintain I will be.

I cried a little while lying in bed, and despite Martha's efforts to coax it out of me I couldn't cry. No encouragement about work helped. Now I think that's because the problem was that I felt weak and unequal to the task; crying seemed an emotion I couldn't allow myself -- it reinforced my state. I dreamed about work and being late and it raining so that all tolled I had to work very little. Telling.

But today was a good day -- I did all sorts of different things (my hammering has improved) and only had to cut the 2'x8's for two decks.

While I was working I thought about my bad reaction to coming to work. I don't want to be too hard on Leslie because I understand her situation and how it affected what she said Friday when four of us were talking. Leslie asked if I considered myself a workman or a craftsman. Later she asked if I thought I'd go beyond that and ever see myself as an artist. I think her definite stated value (which was powerful on me because it has societal backing) that being a craftsman isn't enough (so heaven help the workwoman which I am at present) and repetitious jobs aren't respectful (worthy of it.) One must be learning something to vindicate repetition. All the power of her statements made me ashamed of my work. (I had a one-act play about Joanne and Lynne coming for lunch and seeing me do repetitious sawing and I felt ashamed. That's how I discovered shame was my emotion.)

It was easy to get out of this state of mind by thinking of the redefinition of useful work -- after the revolution. Also my work today was more interesting.

On the way home I was thinking about how hard being an apprentice is and whether I'll be able to last four years.

The whole Pentagon Papers scandal has interested me in a way the newspapers haven't for a long time. I was thinking as I was driving home that Daniel Ellsberg's action was really quite right-on for a liberal. It's also fascinating to think of his moral dilemma and the courage he mustered like Sir Thomas More did. I decided (probably just on the grounds that he will go to jail) that he was doing more of the work of the revolution than I was at the moment. Then my vision of the actual rev came to mind, how difficult and painful I conceive of it as and how it's odd that I see the rev's hard work as beginning at a definite point in time and that nothing that goes before it will be quite the same or as hard. It occurred to me that my job as an apprentice was certainly the only thing I've done that has come close to requiring of me physically and emotionally what the rev will need from me. Then I wondered if my being a carpenter's apprentice wasn't in some was connected with the revolution: either as preparation or as part of the revolutionary process that is vague to me yet but which I'm coming to comprehend.

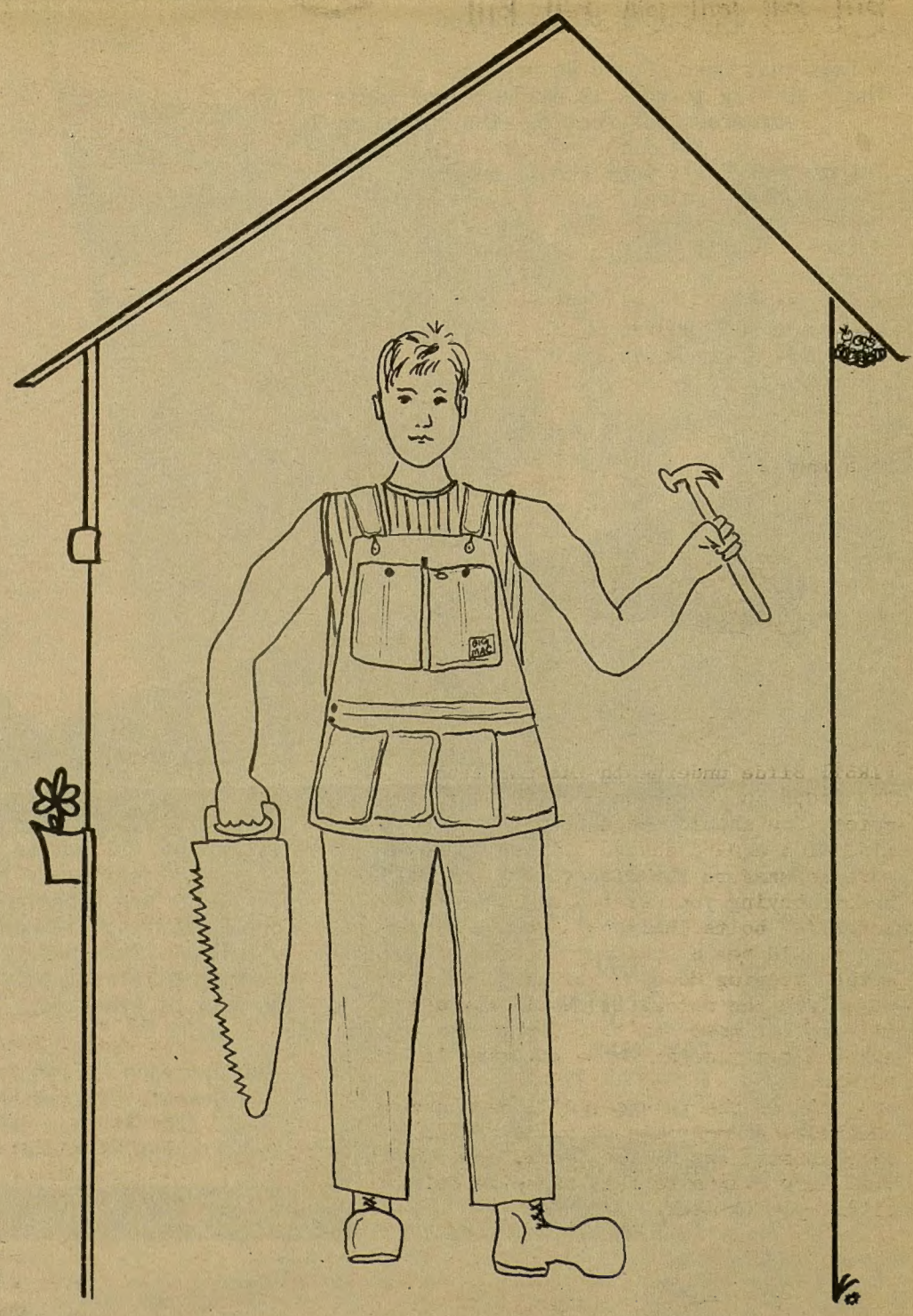
That made it much easier to think about all the initial difficult things -- whether I'll be strong enough, enduring enough, the loneliness of working all day around men who can't, because I'm a woman, include me in their comraderie, whether the person within me can withstand the day constantly insulting two things that I am, a feminist and a gay woman.

Besides, my being a carpenter's apprentice just might be part of the revolution in the ways it might affect women now. Like the other day when five boys and one girl came to ask if we had wood for a doghouse. Everyone thought it was pretty funny because the construction company we work for doesn't sell to the public -- the yard is a warehouse. But Chuck, the yard man who drives the fork lift truck to load and unload trucks was in a strange mood and not only gave them some wood but sawed it to the right size. I heard him ask the girl if she were going to help or let her brothers do the building. Then I caught her watching me so I decided to ignore what the guys would think. I walked over to her and told her (in my high pitched voice, so that in my overalls and short hair she'd be sure to know I was a woman) to be sure and make her brothers let her help. She looked at me and nodded.

Also there's the effect it will have on the future rev. I certainly began to consider it because of my belief that at this stage of the struggle women should be learning the essential skills: electronics, mechanic, plumbing and carpentry. Both for our own survival as a community and for their possible future use.

July 20. Now after time and thought I have different feelings. One is shame that I allowed myself to respect in a revolutionary way Daniel Ellsberg. It was shallow thought on my part that looked only at his actions not his motives. After more reading I discovered that he was motivated by liberalism in all its ugliness -- his wish that the war end, coming from a desire that this country (while still treasuring free speech and press) see the error of its ways, and prove his faith in the principles on which the U.S. was founded.

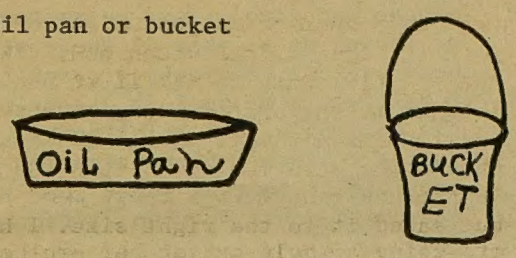
My job is also going much better. I am stronger and so don't have to endure it as much and I'm beginning to understand more about the trade. One important thing that has made my job easier is realizing how it is work -- or the nature of the job. I always understood in my other jobs, maybe because they were more familiar to me and my class background, how they were work or what it was about them that made them work. But I haven't until recently comprehended this about carpentry. Maybe part of it is that my other jobs like teaching involved dealing with people and had some supposed altruistic or humanistic motive.



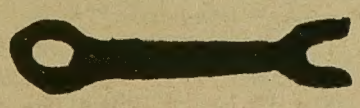
CHANGE YOUR OIL, HONEY!

Things you need for changing the oil in most standard American cars;

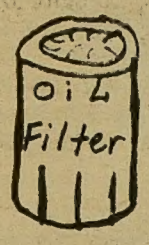
1) Oil pan or bucket



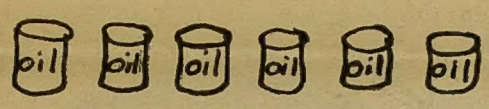
2) Wrench

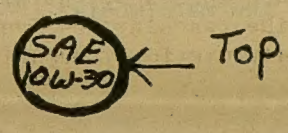


3) oil filter

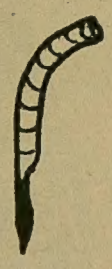


4) six cans of 10-30 (heavy) oil -summer
(light) oil -winter





5) spout for oil cans



6) a rag

FIRST: Slide underneath the car from the front on your back looking up at the motor. You should see a bolt on the bottom side of a square shaped oil pan. Make sure to measure the diameter of the bolt before buying your wrench.eg. 1965 Fords have 7/8" bolts. While you're under there you should see a cylinder (approx. 4"long) either hanging down or sticking out sideways from the motor. It should say oil filter, but some don't.If you're unsure, ask the gas station women to point it out to you.

All of the things you'll need can be purchased at most big shopping center type stores. eg. K-Mart,Sears, etc. They will have charts to tell the size oil filter you'll need.

READY TO START?

Be sure the car hasn't been used for quite awhile so that everything is cooled down.

1) slide oil pan or bucket under the bolt in the car's oil pan.

2) remove the bolt with your wrench and wipe the bolt clean. The oil should be flowing into the oil pan or bucket.

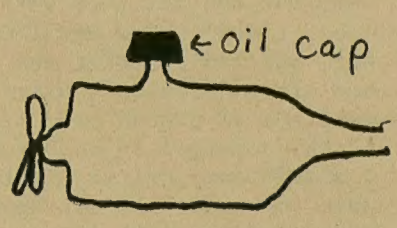
3) while it's draining you can remove the oil filter by either turning it with your hands or using an oil filter wrench if you can't turn it. They are approx. $3 and can be purchased at auto supply stores. Some oil filters bolt on and are changed by removing and replacing the bolt. Most screw on and off. Wipe the surface where the oil filter came off clean. There will be some oil left in the filter so dump it in the oil pan or bucket. You can then throw it away and put on the new one.

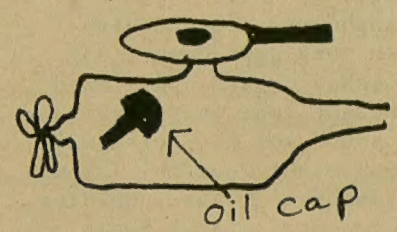
4) put a thin film of machine oil or any light oil on the top gasket of the oil filter. Then screw it on the place where the other one came off. Don't use the oil filter wrench now. Your hand will tighten it enough.

5) after all the oil has drained out replace the bolt and tighten it with your wrench as tight as you can to prevent leaks.

6) remove everything from underneath the car.

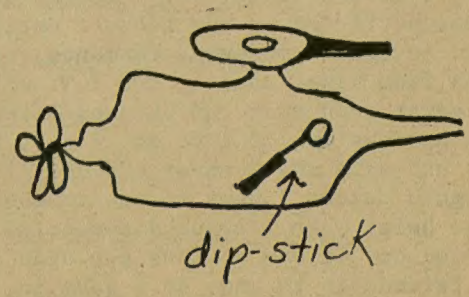
7) open the hood and close above the oil filter or on top of the engine there should be a round black cap saying oil.(some don't) Remove the cap. Put the oil spout in an oil can. The spout punctures the can so it must be pushed in hard. Pour in the oil where the cap came off. About 3 quarts will do now.





8) start your engine and let it idle for approx. 1 minute checking for leaks under the car from the oil filter or around the oil pan bolt. Then increase the speed for 3 min. and check for leaks again. If there are none everything is tight and turn off the car.

9) then look in the hood again along the side of the motor the oil filter is on and there should be a thin rod with a loop on the end(dip-stick) running down into the car's oil pan. Pull this out and wipe it off with a rag. You'll notice at the end there is written add ¦ full ¦. Stick it back in and then pull it out again. Read where the oil level is at. If it's not up to full yet put back the stick and add more oil checking to see when it's full. When it registers full replace the oil cap, close the hood and you're ready to go.



The oil should be changed every 3000 miles. The old oil can be kept in a bucket or old can and taken to the dump. It kills grass and won't wash away. You don't get back as much as you put in so there's not that much to get rid of.

GOOD LUCK!

A woman? July 5, 1971

10-24

My earliest recollection of 'love' was when I was in 6th grade for my best friend Maria, who seemed to have so many of the things I yearned for such as extremely advanced musical talent, money, maturity, gracious parents, etc. Music was our whole life and we went to each other's recitals and concerts. I somehow felt more talented and strong when I was with her. I had to move at the end of our 7th grade year and was torn knowing I wouldn't see her very much, if at all. I bought her an identification bracelet (which was my thing for a long time. If anyone had given me one I would have treasured it forever. No one ever did, but I certainly kept the jewelry stores in business.) I called her up on the phone and at the end of a very long pause, waiting for mother to leave the room, I told her I loved her. She told me she loved me too, which no one could have brought me down from for days. I delivered the bracelet shortly after that and with renewed confidence in our love tried to kiss her. Well, it was a very awkward attempt, but just as I went to kiss her she turned her cheek. Completely embarrassed, I left. Our relationship ended there with sporadic visits for many years. She ended up married to a music teacher twice her age after much scandal. I found out in college that she had announced to a room full of women in the dorm about my "homosexual tendencies." Of course she was right, but it's always amazed me how much a childhood kiss could mean.

The move from a medium-sized to a small rural town was a real shocker. There was more opportunity for many close relationships to develop rather than just one or two. I immediately fell in love with my piano teacher's daughter, who was five years older than me. She was a loner, because her family was considered really wierd. She had bright, bushy red hair, B.O., a back brace, and was sickly. Our relationship consisted mainly of long philosophical walks discussing life and the hows and whys, etc. Our relationship was never discussed openly, but there were *many times* alone in her bedroom when we would play "I want to hold your hand"-"Don't you dare" games which we both enjoyed but could have been much better since I never won. Her family moved out of town, and I never saw her again. I learned later she'd gone East to school, got pregnant, married, and lived unhappily ever after.

The next year was filled with several one or two week crushes with four different women and with a few fumbling attempts at heterosexuality.

Up until my sophomore year in high school I had been very indiscreet, not knowing that my behavior was considered "abnormal." I thought that there was something unlovable about me, otherwise why would so many people not love me. I wondered why I got laughed at about holding hands with Jane in chorus, so I just laughed back. On one side Jane fit right into the high school scene. She was a cheer leader, extremely attractive, and was real outgoing socially. On the other hand her father was a teacher, and her mother had tried to shoot herself but only succeeded in damaging part of her brain. She never went out, and Jane brought few people home with her because of her "crazy" mother.

One night we were sitting in the car talking when she asked me if I knew what homosexual meant. I told her I didn't, and she told me to look it up when I got home. I looked it up, but actually didn't become horrified by the thought until I heard several homosexist comments, and jokes from kids, adults, and T.V. which I'd never been aware of before. After several professions of love on my part for Jane she said she'd never see or talk to me again unless I went to see somebody about help. When I refused she cried and carried on. It was obvious she didn't want our friendship to end, so I gave in. I made the terrible mistake of talking to the school psychologist. It was excruciating because I didn't know what to say. Finally, I ended up telling her "I become too close to my friends, and I only care about them." She didn't say anything reassuring at all and recommended I see a psychiatrist with my parents' knowledge. Well, that ended that in a hurry. I would never have seen any of my girlfriends again if mom and dad would have found out.

One night when mom and dad were having one of their arguments I left to see Jane who was super upset that evening. (She thought she was pregnant.) She was lying on the bed staring into space, and I was shaking from being so upset with my parents. We looked at each other for a long time, and then she put her arms around me, and I kissed her and we just lay there for hours. When I got up to leave she said

DYKE

that she didn't know if I was an angel or the devil. That was the only close physical contact we ever had. I saw her approximately a year after she got married, and she told me that her sex life left a little to be desired. She said she just about called me up once and was going to leave him and come live with me, but she was pregnant. I haven't seen her since but learned she had another baby.

I wasn't too concerned about being a lesbian, because I knew when I got to the big university that I would meet a "nice young man," hold his hand, and be so happy. Well, wouldn't you know, I was real attracted to my hall advisor who just happened to live next door. She was flunking out of school, had a boyfriend 2,000 miles away, and was miserable. She liked to talk to me but was real concerned that her image as advisor might be damaged. At night when she'd be upset, she'd pound on the wall and that was my signal for going to comfort her. I was at the point of flunking out myself when she finally did. The night before she left she told me she loved me, never to quit music, and that she had told the house mother about my "homosexual tendencies" so she could keep an eye on me. I was never hasseled about it, but always wondered when I would be and resented it terribly. She got married the following Spring and sailed off into the matrimonial sunset.

My next relationship was to last all through college and one year beyond. It was by far the most painful and to this day is hard to look at realistically. Kate had a very strange combination of inferiority and snobbishness. She wanted to be loved so bad, but never wanted to or couldn't commit herself to a love relationship. To make a long story short, for four years we did everything together day and night with a few physical caresses from year to year. She knew I was gay from the first week I met her so the caresses and love did not come as a surprise to her, but she met them with cold indifference. I don't know why I continued to love her, but I did. After two or three years one night I couldn't stand it any more and went all to pieces over it. I then went to psych. hospital to become straight. Well, I didn't come out straight, but better able to handle the situation of loving a so-called straight woman.

The year I left school we saw each other frequently and for three months before Christmas for some unknown reason she decided to sleep with me. I always made love to her, but it was never reciprocated. I always wondered why but never asked too many questions being afraid it would end. I was ecstatically happy after waiting five years and finally thinking she might want a love relationship for us. Everything was developing slowly but well, when one morning after she wanted me to make love to her she said she never wanted to see me again. She said she was straight and could never be a lesbian. I didn't know what to say, but I felt crushed and very confused. I still can't imagine it. One time later I merely inferred she could be gay, and she said that all the lesbians she'd ever known were slightly crazy. (She knew plenty.) I haven't seen much of her since, but she's not married and there's still hope for her. but somebody else is going to have to do the hoping.

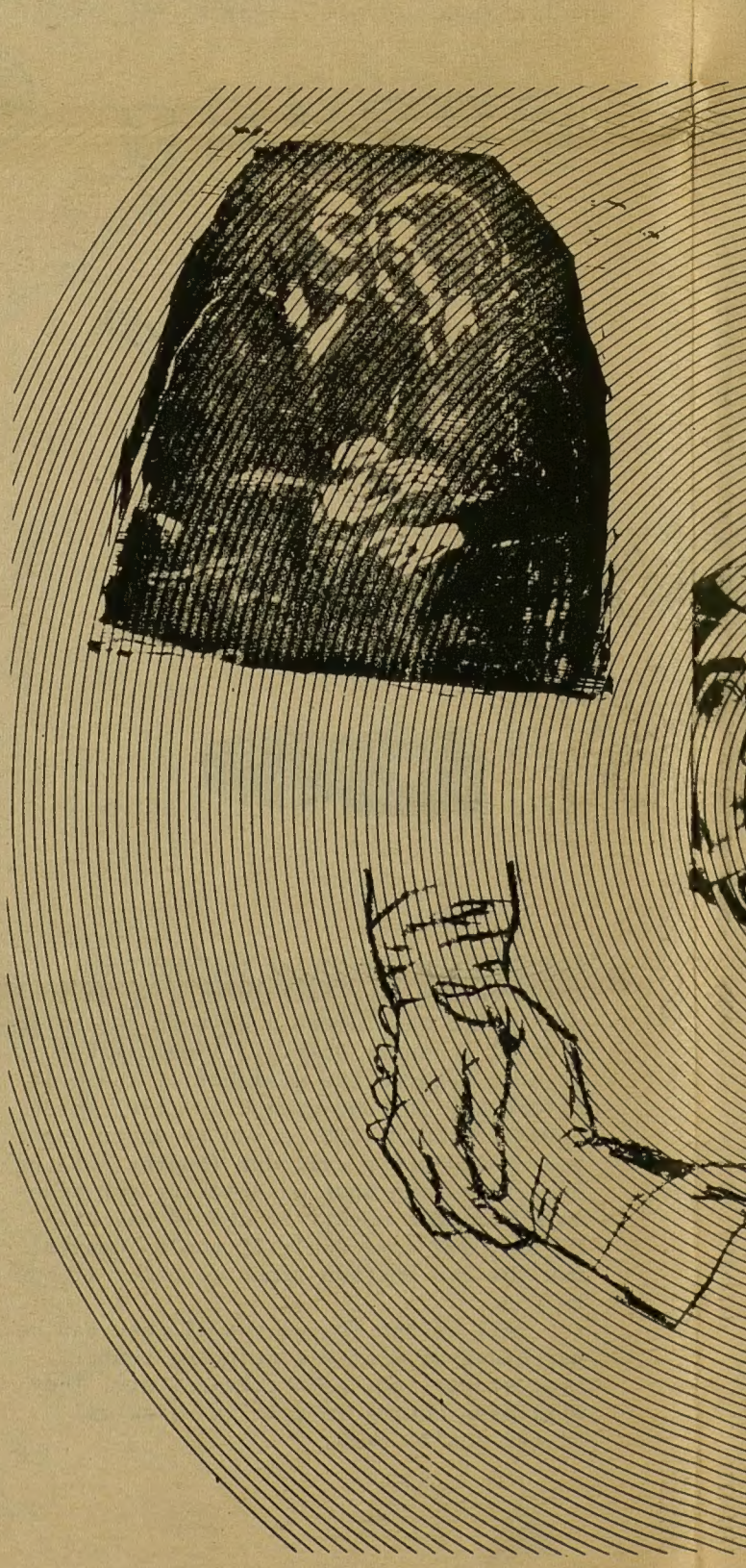
For exactly a year after that I worked hard, didn't do much socially, and just spent many hours by myself thinking about my love for people and why they were always straight, why did they get married, why didn't I have the courage to stop loving them, etc. I think I came to a few good solutions for me, and I know I'm not alone. I decided I would never again love anyone who didn't love me (women incapable of loving me because of their straight heterosexual hang-ups) or sacrifice what I believe in or what is a part of me for the sake of a love relationship. I'm not saying I haven't been attracted to straight or married women, but there's a huge difference between attraction and love.

HUP! HUP!

I think that for too long gay women have been oppressed in various ways by straight women. All of us at one time or another have looked to straight women for acceptance or love. There is no way that this can come about just like there's no way I could ever love or understand a straight woman again. This has been proven to me over and over again.

Right now I'm having a beautiful lesbian relationship, and wish all the love and power to gay women everywhere.

If this is in any way offensive to straight women, that's great!



We have been talking about monogamy lately on a lot of different levels -- whether it's good or bad -- how we feel in relationships or outside of them. I don't remember it being much of an issue here or at least an issue I was dealing with. The last time I can remember that subject being a constant topic of debate things were really different. I was married. And the debate most often took place between me and other married women and lesbians, the former running down the evils of monogamous love relationships and the latter saying that our terms and our experiences from which our views grew did not apply to them.

Things have changed drastically for me since that time and I'm never sure whether your head changes and then or therefore your living situation or vice versa. I imagine it is closer to the latter. My view of one to one relationships a year ago was so shaped by the situation I lived in.

Marriage was stifling and on the basis of that daily experience I formed a negative opinion of all intense one to one relationships. My vision of a better world was for one to be a strong and independent revolutionary woman -- alone -- self sufficient. In retrospect the perspective I had of monogamous relationships at that time seems so understandable given the situation I lived with. I believe your vision is limited to the confines of your experience and your perspective on any situation determined by your role or position within the power relationship at play there.

One reason for my absolute negation of monogamy was that I wanted out of my marriage but did not have the strength to leave the security of that relationship but that was solved painfully but easily because he left me. I moved into a women's collective and along with the changes in my living situation came changes in my perspective on one to one relationships. My marriage-influenced view became obsolete in the female culture I had entered.

I soon saw that exclusive feelings I had did not have to be held in such tight rein in a female environment. The things -- the bad things -- that an exclusive relationship had meant to me as a married woman were not totally present with other women and the defenses necessary for survival at one time became unnecessary and could be dropped. I began to see that all the problems could not be laid on one to one relationships per se any more than I think women's problems on a broader level can be blamed on the family -- there are too many variables to think so absolutely as "monogamy should be smashed." "Anything between two women is different than between a man and a woman" they told me and it wasn't until I could see this that I could become gay identified.

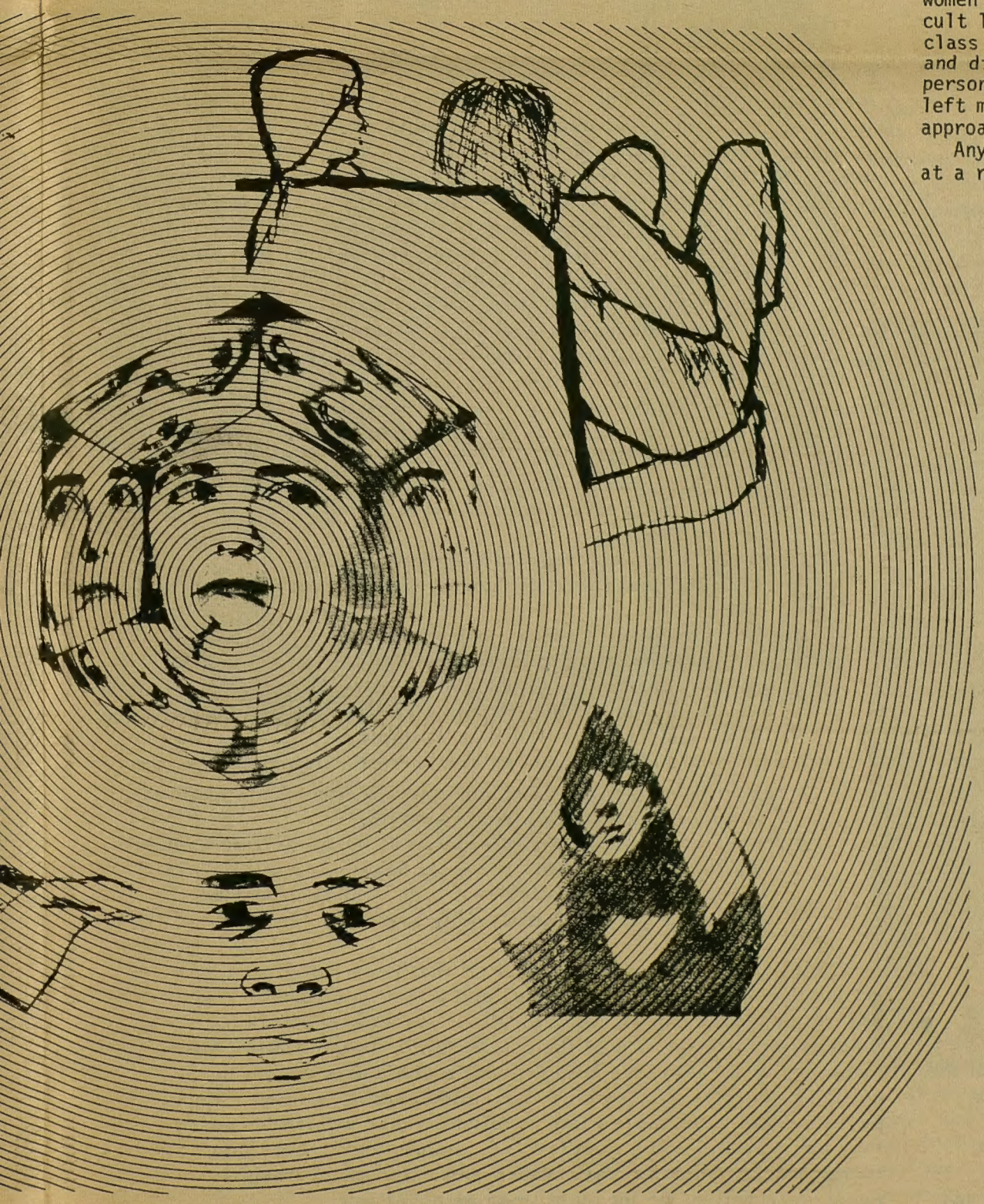
Mostly I think monogamy exists -- it happens that people have exclusive feelings for each other and it happens within collectives of women. The idealism of saying it is bad is too much of a self denial of people's feelings for me to relate to and a way of avoiding the real struggle we have over the problems of working and living collectively with each other.

I think it is hard for women to honestly love each other on any level. Without the rigid conventions of heterosexuality -- who does what when, what the relationship means, what commitments we must make to each other -- are all fresh decisions to be made. The strength and aggressiveness that calls for and the equality it takes makes lesbian love very beautiful but very much of a struggle. Because I feel that struggle is important and because it takes courage to love each other I can't see labeling those relationships that we develop as counter-revolutionary. Which is not to say that monogamous relationships within collectives do not complicate matters. They do and it can be very hard on anyone not in one but in collectives involving mostly couples. But I don't think the way to deal with these problems is to attack those relationships that exist.

For those of us not involved in intense relationships there is the fantasy of happiness ever after once we get in one. When I got unmarried I still thought I was ending one relationship -- but I don't think I'll ever have one again like that. Still it's hard not to live on those fantasies but the happiness they promise comes with the conventions that define them. Absolute security can be close to confinement. The sacrifices are high. That kind of total love security I tend to desire could only be kept with lies and sacrifices -- lies that women can't really get away with, with each other. We know ourselves too well. Yet my fantasy of that perfect relationship smacks of that kind of stagnant security and exclusiveness and I know I'll never have it. I can't afford the lies and have little courage for the honesty to combat them. The aloneness honesty can bring hurts a lot and I feel lost and insecure often in a sea of twos. But the complexity of human emotions leaves me baffled -- desiring independence but wanting the security of an intense relationship. It's hard to put it all in a rational framework that I can deal with. So I mostly try to keep in mind that no relationship is perfect and any relationship I may have is a struggle within the relationship itself and concerning how that relationship relates to other women in my community.

Mostly when I start to think about monogamy I start to think about what a materialist I am. How we can act, how we relate to each other is so greatly affected by the material conditions we live with. Even though I think we have to change both, to think I can be in control and self sufficient in my personal relationships when I can have so little control or self respect in this society is to expect too much of myself. I often think of the confidence that men have in their relationships -- that gall to be aggressive -- I hate them for that but some amount of aggressiveness is called for to honestly relate to other people. I think men have that confidence only because they can afford it -- the material conditions they live with are better and yet to relate to and love each other we have to develop that confidence -- even before we can tangibly change our material conditions and that is a tall order. I'm sure it is important to try and support women struggling on this level but I guess I feel it is a difficult level for me probably for a lot of reasons like being working class so that the level at which I must survive is so material and different or maybe because the time I have had to spend on personal relationships has been limited until recently and thus left me with less experience or a more rigid and simplistic approach to relationships.

Anyway it is a schizophrenic struggle with me and proceeding at a rather slow rate.



Each new way to move
gives me a glimpse of a new way to feel
and to express what I am feeling
to a woman I might care to know well
But my paths of movement
are still shackled heavily by
the conditions I am confined to
and with them my perspective and my vision
of ways to see and act
If I could only move freely
I could act freely on my emotions
but for now they remain
as caged as my floundering gestures
to break the confines of oppression.
The confidence it would take
to act honestly would jeopardize
the timidity required of my position
But when we break loose
I will pause to kiss you, my friend.

So far our analysis labels common to all women

These pages are written for women in the women's movement. These four pages may not be reprinted in part by anyone. We are concerned about women reading this and wondering just where we're coming from. We are not making a pitch for some caucus of the male left. We are women who see working together as women, loving and living together as women to hold primary importance. And to that end, we feel it necessary to deal with our class differences. Much that we say can be used by women in such organizations as the Socialist Worker's Party to put down the women's movement. We recognize that, but think it would be--has been--detrimental to the women's movement to shy away from class questions.

We consider ourselves very much a part of the women's movement and as a part of it wish to engage in self-criticism on the issue of class. We have not credited the excerpts from the women's media we have used as examples of middle-class bias in the women's movement because, while some are worse than others, we want to point out how the women's movement doesn't have much of a class consciousness. We are not disengaging ourselves from the women's movement. Nor do we feel that the women's movement can be singled out as middle-class or lacking a class consciousness. We see little class consciousness in political groups in this country, only groups that have adopted a marxist analysis which is a far cry from any real class consciousness. Perhaps because women have seen the folly in rallying with socialist groups who promise freedom for women but whose analysis has never included women in any but a peripheral way, we have shied away from dealing with economic class divisions. Or perhaps we did not want anything to destroy that beginning surge of sisterhood and women's consciousness we were developing.

But we have nothing to gain as women by denying the realities of our lives--like the class nature of this society and how we are affected by that or what it means to be an American. Dealing with these issues does not mean we must spend our energies in male defined political work (i.e. anti-imperialist women) but we cannot form any trustworthy analysis by ignoring these issues. By viewing women as a class or caste and leaving it at that, we ignore the reality of economic class. And by dwelling on the universality of women's oppression we forget, or perhaps never recognized, what it must mean to be an American. Consequently, we have felt free to criticize women in other countries about their consciousness as women. We doubt whether we have this right given the suffering other women in the world have felt at American hands. And to absolve ourselves of all guilt because we are oppressed within America dements our thinking on the questions of what a revolution in this country could mean, on what liberation of all women can mean.

America uses 40% of the world's raw materials. Will a woman president of the World Bank change that?

America uses 40% of the world's raw materials. Will equal pay for women executives change that?

America uses 40% of the world's raw materials. Will new role models (woman doctor, woman lawyer, woman Ph.D.) change that?

Presently, in the women's movement these questions are illegitimate--met with hostile stares, evasive answers, outright charges of being anti-woman. Most of these issues that middle-class women see as important don't have any real meaning for women who are struggling for material survival and it has been incredibly easy for middle-class women to charge lower class women with being anti-woman. The philosophy of sisterhood is a very neat way--has been a really effective way--to drive lower class women away from the women's movement. Working class and lower class women have not gained materially from the fruits of imperialism, but middle class women certainly have. Their refusal to admit this and instead to declare a common oppression among all women makes it so easy to avoid class questions. But there are class questions and we're going to have to deal with them.

A despicable kind of middle class mentality characterizes the women's movement now, where equal pay for equal work inevitably gets translated into how much less a university or professional woman gets paid, where achievement is measured in terms of becoming a middle-class professional or a "free" woman traveling around the country soaking up sisterhood while living off that middle-class bank account. (Why do so many women travellers say it's easy to live without spending much money and flaunt their middle-class privileges while they've got the security of always getting bailed out by parents or savings accounts? Why do they look at you so strangely when you ask them how they live? Why do they treat you like some kind of freak when you don't have that kind of freedom? Those are class things, and they're the same things that happen to lower class women all their lives--being made to feel stupid and cloddy for not understanding how easy it is to be free. It happens all the time among sisters. It happens at every level of the women's movement.)

In the name of meeting the needs of all women much of the women's movement has become a vehicle for middle-class success stories. "I went to law school at 31" or "I'm getting my Ph.D. and going to teach women's studies," are not relevant to lower class women. This country could not be what it is, could not do what it does to anyone who is not middle-class without the active support of middle-class women. How will opening all those jobs, jobs that used to be reserved for middle-class males, help anyone but those individual middle-class women? They can and have functioned just as well as men to enforce the class system in this country and to uphold the international system that allows this country to exploit other countries. Until middle-class women recognize their place in the class system, really face it and not claim a phony powerlessness by always measuring their power against their male counterparts, sisterhood is a sham.

You only have to look at some of the women's newsletters and papers to really get the message that the benefits we want are available only for the middle class. I want to describe one that comes out of the midwest. (Only because we live and work in the midwest--the picture is the same in newsletters from every region of the country.) Top items included:

---Medical schools discriminate against women.
---Group health insurance excludes gynecological benefits for women.
---Disability insurance costs more for women.
---Women have more difficulty purchasing the deluxe insurance policies than men. (horror of horrors)
---An article on clinical depression that keeps citing Sylvia Plath and Virginia Woolf as examples.
---A report on children's books and "better role models."
---A report on women lawyers and how a woman was appointed as the magistrate of a court system.
---A report on activities for International Women's Day including the comment that "the most heartening fact was the announced participation of a wide variety of women's liberation groups, all working together."

Middle class women should find all that heartening because all they need is teach-ins, rallys, and a feeling of unity. They have to prove we can all work together--to what end? Deluxe insurance policies? All of the concerns in this newsletter are examples of a real class antagonism, a class antagonism by omitting everything relevant to non-middle-class women. Equal pay for equal work means lots to middle-class women because they can imagine doing middle-class male's jobs. Let them imagine doing working class males jobs. Let them imagine equal work before we let them imagine equal pay.

what is common only to middle-class women:

Near the end of the newsletter is the real class antagonism, not something omitted, but the outright shit that working class women in this movement are forced to listen to much of the time:

> Bernadette Devlin has been quoted as saying, "I wouldn't take the Queen of England and sort of throw her out in the road. I'd take her and teach her how to type." Must women be sexists, too? The Queen, with her years of experience in government, surely is at least qualified to take an exam. for the higher civil service in the Hon. Ms. Devlin's revolutionary bureaucracy. More likely, she would prefer to breed horses....

The everyday facts of most working-class women's lives are much closer to Bernadette Devlin's, to the realities of economics and family life that she grew up with, than to any of the super-bitches who wrote that--women who hide behind the accusation of sexist to hide their class antagonism. I do not share any joy with middle-class women who can be so blind and offensive on class issues while they reap the benefits of their class. What they don't understand now from a position of less power than their males, they will never understand later when their foot is more securely placed on my neck.

> **Professional? Revolutionary? Homemaker? Student? What do these women have in common? The need for women's liberation, of course!**
>
> **Many women are constantly striving to prove they are true professionals in the labor market in order to justify their having attained a level of responsibility. And at the same time they are facing frustrations of further job advancement.**
>
> **Many women are constantly striving to prove they are TESTED revolutionaries in order to secure their place within the male-dominated movement.**
>
> **Many homemakers are constantly worrying about using the best detergent, the right cosmetic to slow aging, and having the proper centerpiece and clean kitchen floor in order to best reflect their role as help-mate and husband's job-advancer.**
>
> **Many students are constantly striving for fulfillment which romanticism has led them to believe can be found in the love which overcomes all -- the perfect relationship, the perfect marriage which substitutes for everything else.**
>
> **Because women find themselves in many different roles with many different problems and are generally isolated from each other, they tend to look upon their problems as strictly personal problems. If we feel frustrated, depressed, anxious, afraid or angry we tend to see the solution in terms of our own personal readjustment. But we need to put less emphasis on psychiatry and turn to anthropology and sociology and ask why do so many women have these same feelings. We must recognize the element of commonness in our personal situations.**

One element of commonness in the personal situations in the above excerpt from a midwest women's paper is their middle-classness. The title of the article is "Sisterhood: gettin' it together" and it is a good example of the sisterhood conception in that it excludes working or lower class women. That philosophy of "everywoman is our sister" is defined by middle class women who are blind to anyone but other middle class women, who refuse to see the influence of class. They say "women find themselves in many different roles with many different problems" but refuse to see that women find themselves in many different classes and therefore have different problems. To admit this most women would have to identify with their class which is to admit to their own role in oppressing other women. This is hard and painful to do but the only way to begin struggling with sisterhood on any real level. Unless that is done I think we have to realize that any analysis the women's movement comes up with now cannot be trusted. The analysis we have come up with labels common to all women what is only common to middle class women. Any strategy based on such blindness can only aid middle class women and has very little to do with all women.

> Each of us is unique; we all have worth. We must break out of the mold and demonstrate to society that we don't fit any typification.
>
> Women have minds and they can use them. Most women, though, graduate, work for a year or two, then get married and quit. Why? They've been conditioned to believe this is a natural pattern. The resulting waste of woman power is shameful.

Most women, though, don't graduate and lots of women work all their lives because even if they sense this "natural pattern" they cannot materially afford to follow it. The middle class (including the women in it) always see middle class unused labor as a waste, but they see the labor of lower or working class people as that labor which can be eliminated.

I hate middle-class women for talking about industrializing housework (fit only for machines or those maids so reluctantly employed) instead of talking about industrializing what lawyers or "higher civil servants" do. A secretary or a maid performs immesurably more valuable work than the high paid paper shufflers we call lawyers, yet we encourage women to become lawyers. But lawyers get more money and serve the interest of the middle class which has managed to fuck up most everything else by their "laws" and now we want women to become a part of that. Somehow we've adopted all the screwy economic values of the middle class and talk about "women's work" as dull but high-paid man's work as a good "role model." There is nothing inherently pernicious about service-type jobs that women do, but middle class women identify these as women's jobs and are repulsed by that. I hate the classist nature of this movement that can flippantly talk about "industrializing" (read: do away with) housework and not talk about "industrializing"--and I mean do away with--what lawyers do. Let's start talking about "industrializing" all those middle class jobs and creating "role models" that have more to do with the realities of lower class women's lives than the fantasies of middle class women who want to prove they're as competent as their fathers or husbands.

HELP WANTED: FEMALE
99.6 hours a week; bed and bored; must be a good cook, careful shopper, and loving babysitter; responsible for providing pleasant atmosphere and constant emotional support.
No pay.

Supposedly, we are free now to work, to have some money of our own, some economic independence. But we average half the yearly salary that men make. We get paid so little when we work that we might as well be right back in the home. Even when we spend all day on a job, we end up doing housework anyway.

Free to work? Working class and lower class women must work to physically survive. It is a strange conception of freedom, one that could only be held by women who can assume that if they go "back to the home" they will be supported there. Housework, anyway--again, a blind view of working class labor as not worth doing.

Our analysis of labor says middle-class labor is

But we have our doubts and objections. For our own philosophies the existence of such service occupations is unnecessary. We oppose the elitism which implies that some of us are too elevated to clean our own mess. In a similar situation to the domestic worker is the charwoman, who cleans office buildings after the other employees go home. It may be that this kind of work can be eliminated altogether, with other offic e workers cooperatively cleaning out their own ashtrays, wiping their own desks and sweeping or vacuuming the floor. These workers also are hired through agencies which probably treat them as little more than labor units. Unlike domestics they are spared direct contact with the people who have a lot of ego invested in the appearance of the office. The maximum wage of $2 an hour is hardly adequate, much less something to root for--but domestic workers rarely do so well.

An east coast women's paper reported on the formation of an agency to train domestic workers for cleaning jobs. Women felt perfectly free to comment on the value of this kind of labor, to the effect that such jobs as those of domestics are menial service labor and should not exist. This conception of what labor is socially necessary has permeated the women's movement. It is difficult to disagree when you are told that no one should have to do the kind of work you do. I used to agree and never verbalize those secret fears--I don't know how to do anything else and just shuffle along laboring at chores I was being told were unworthy of doing. No road to liberation of working people but some path to self-hatred at not being useful as defined by middle class values of usefulness. The reasoning hinges on the service aspect of such work. But is there more service involved in cleaning an office for a corporation than there is in teaching the ideology of the middle and upper classes to American children, or upholding the legal system by being a lawyer? So far our analysis of labor--*its* social necessity--comes to pretty much that middle class labor is socially necessary and productive and working or lower class labor is not. I see no place in a revolutionary society for the ideology of middle-class America and consequently no use for those professionals who serve to perpetuate that ideology through art or academia or administrators of private wealth. I do see the necessity of production of necessary goods, the necessity of sanitation.

Let's worry about getting women into equal positions before we worry about more freedom for all. As various movements have discovered already, more freedom for all has seldom really meant women.

Let's get a piece of the pie that middle-class women can tangibly get within this country, within this system--and later when we have all those middle-class advantages we'll help those poor unfortunate others. Promises, Promises. I think we must at least acknowledge one probable effect. If women hold equally with men those positions of power, they become half the power structure that must be fought by working and lower class women. The commonness of women's oppression, tenuous economically as it is now, would become unrecognizable. I'm not sure how much it's worth but it has meant something to identify with other women, to identify with our position of powerlessness. With this shorn in half so blatantly, women as a class will be little more than a joke.

Many middle-class women are off and running now because they've got the chance--look at your local newspaper for their success stories. They don't have to listen to lower class women and most of them won't. If they're achievers, they'll go to law school, med school, grad school, ad nauseum. If they're revolutionaries, they'll split for a caravan around the country. But they won't do anything to change the everyday reality, the everyday hassle, the everyday cruelties that face working and lower class women. They can get the change they need and the approval of their middle-class counterparts without changing the reality of a single lower class woman's life.

CAMBRIDGE--A yearlong feminist studies program organized around seminars and culminating in an M.A. is being offered this coming academic year at Goddard College. The seminars are in the fields of feminist history, cross-cultural studies of women, child-rearing and socialization of children, women and the media, women and the law, economics of women's oppression, male sex roles, and feminist psychology. The child-rearing seminar is open to men and women, the male sex roles seminar open to men only, and the rest of the seminars are open to women only. Additional seminars may be included if there is demand for them.

Tuition will range from $1800-$2000 with a few partial scholarships available. For those who don't want a degree but want to spend time working on a seminar, there is no charge. The present faculty includes Ann Froines, Linda Gordon, Sheli Wortis, and Rochelle Ziegler. They state: "We believe that the scholarly work we are doing has to come both out of and feed back into the movement, that its purpose is to raise our consciousness, to help us see what our alternatives are, and to help us act."

For application forms and catalogs, write Cambridge-Goddard, 56 Boylston Street, Cambridge, Mass. Non-degree applications should send their completed forms to c/o Arnold, 94 Bromfield Road, Somerville, Mass 02144.

It certainly will "feed in and out of the movement" if the movement is to remain as middle class as it is now. Certainly lower and working class women cannot afford to pay $1800 or $2000 to supposedly learn about themselves in the propaganda machine of corporate america. They can, of course, take the courses for free, but then they don't get the rewards of that education (jobs, money) because, after all, they didn't pay for it. That's what it has always been about. But these comments are superficial and there is so much more to be said about what part academia plays in American society. Education in this country, as far as I can see, serves to uphold the middle-class ideology and to train people to continue to uphold it.

And a last word to the bitch who wrote in another midwest newsletter:

I believe all women have common concerns at heart. There is a universality of emotion and experience that draws us together whether we are stuck with the label upper class, lower class, radical, conservative, black, white, professional or on and on ad infinitum. All of us are concerned with equal pay for equal jobs. Many of us are nauseated by advertisements that make us look as if our lives revolve around furniture polish, men's egos, or feminine deodorent spray.

I believe that women will never become politically or even personally effective as long as the media continues to portray us as a gathering of homosexuals and emotional cripples: dirty, screaming, close-minded and "unfeminine."

No woman was "stuck" with the label lower class. It has a meaning and a reality for every lower class woman's life that you will never understand, and one that I'm really finally beginning to understand. The lower class is no accident. "Equal pay" and concern with your image on the media are your way of saying "give the bright middle-class woman a chance." That's your problem. You, and everything you stand for, are my problem.

a social necessity and working-class labor is not

Bernadette Devlin has been the target of criticism from women in the women's movement. And the coverage she has received in the women's media has shown a self-righteousness on our part in criticizing her woman's consciousness while totally rejecting her criticism of us on our class consciousness. She spoke in Iowa City and we, too, were disappointed that she had nothing to offer us in furthering our understanding of our oppression as women. And I suppose enjoyed a little "we're so ahead of the rest of the world" haughtyness. I wished she had given me as a working class woman some perspective on what that means--to be a working class woman as distinct from a working class man. But it is not her place to form that analysis for us, nor our place as American women to expect that from her.

We avoided comment on Bernadette's speech because we felt it was not needed, we had much work to do ourselves, issues and problems to work on. But much of the women's movement used her as either a saint or sinner to push their own politics. We're reprinting one of the worst examples and commenting on it because we were offended by it. We can't let our affirmation of ourselves--our poetry--become a destructive, class-biased, self-indulgent cry of the middle class. Our poems will record our revolution, but they will do nothing to make it.

The poem was entitled "Woman to Woman" though it should have been titled "How Superior I am to Bernadette Devlin--I know how to experience shame." Now everyone knows it is the God-given right of middle class people to teach lower class people about shame. You might think with all the experience of not having money, not having all those marks of success, lower class women would have plenty of experience with shame. But middle-class women spend a lot of time telling other women what to be shameful for, what not to, why, how, and when. That's nothing new, but it hurts to see an appeal to our common experience turned into the same old middle-class put down.

I hung my head in shame
hearing Bernadette Devlin say
"as a woman I feel my woman's
oppression"; implicit in her tone of
voice was that as a "revolutionary" she
did not.

Bernadette, you do not know who we are. you think
we wear fur coats and are competing for jobs with
men. you've been believing what you hear on tele-
vision, read in the papers, what your International
Socialists tell you.

Some (lots) of us are able to wear fur coats and she could learn that by reading the independent women's media. This implies that our message has been distorted but does not admit that our message has been classist.

You should know who we are(the woman power
in your voice tells us you can see, hear):
because your analysis of imperialism, the clash
between worker(producer) and owner(user), is
incomplete.

Implicit in the tone is that our analysis is complete.

And until it is complete Ireland will never have
its revolution, not a real one; each will be always
instead bringing you deeper into the pit.

The audacity of any American giving anyone else instructions on their revolution--to see everyone else going deeper into a pit until the analyzers, the poets, the intellectuals say the word and we'll all be free.

And that's a pity, because if ever there was a
white western society that could have a
revolution, where the people would in fact rise up,
where they did in fact rise up, and many of them
are still alive, and believe me, they've passed on
the fever to their children here in Amerika, I know,

It's Ireland. Half of New York City would go tomorrow
to fight. Well actually they might stay home if your
analysis and actions became feminist. The men would
stay home. The women would go.

How nice of us--offering foreign aid but as usual with strings attached.

But our revolution is not that kind of revolution,
striding about, clashes by night, Parliament.
So maybe you wouldn't like it. You have become a
professional, Bernadette. And you have male
privileges, are treated "man to man". Naturally you
don't feel the oppression of women as a revolutionary.

Aren't we saying--you don't like middle class women--and she probably doesn't. What objection would a professional have to what we call revolution?

In fact, you could be taken for a dyke.
But I know you are not one of us; you do not like
women.

How nice to feel ashamed for Bernadette. How typically arrogant to feel "scolded" - to belittle her message and turn everything back to the middle class woman's pain--to allow pity for the "ignorant poor" so long as it doesn't threaten our own claim to oppression.

I hung my head in shame as you scolded us for putting
"women" (which you be-witching-ly embedded within the
pejoritive jelly "white privileged middle-upper class
trip"0) ahead of "working class".

Remembering that earlier in your talk I had been one
with you (my eyes closed, all attention focused on
your sounds) as you described how the "ignorant poor"
had figured out they did all the work while 15% who
did no work got the benefits.

Perhaps the root of oppression is in the middle class family. That doesn't make a very complete analysis and blueprint for revolution.

Remembering now with shame, you never mentioned
housewives, mothers. Is that not work? Is there
something different about it? If so, what? Talk
about the producer being alienated from power.
Never was a class of people more alienated from
power, or for so long. Men and men alone have set
made the decisions that have set into motion
the monsters that destroy us and the planet.

Bernadette, you have seen the head of the
monster, but you do not go deep enough. the
root is in the family.

How kind and brave to spare Bernadette rrom exposing herself. Or was it fear that the class antagonism would show? Fear that she would not have the self-indulgent pain of the middle class wom

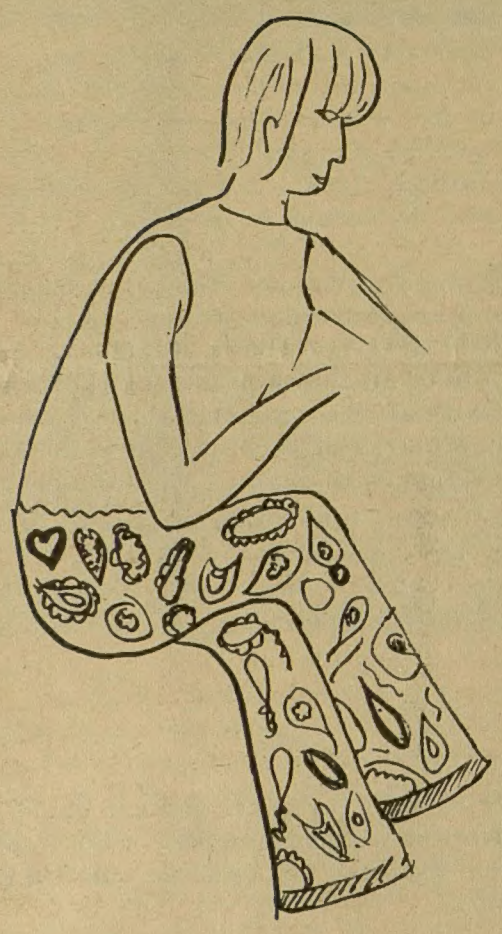
Shame is something few lower class women need any advice from middle class women about. The class system imposes shame in every social situation and lower class women don't have the choice of running off alone to spare their nerves. Middle-class people have been shaming lower-class people all their lives. No woman who has grown up with that kind of shame could have been so blind to such class arrogance.

I felt shame that when you thought of worker you did
not think of us. I hung my head for your shame. for
fera our eyes should meet. Out of the fear that should
our eyes meet, I might sense the little piece of
shame that you in spite of yourself could not hide

(too honest, a woman); and should you sense my
registering of yuor shame - that would be too heavy.
It is easier on the nerves if shame is experienced
alone. It is a vulnerable state.

But I'll give you this : when the understanding does
hit you, you"ll (and women like you) have the toughest
job of all : where does one start in Ireland?

Where does one start in America? We flounder about without the slightest idea while oppressing the rest of the world and you talk about the shame she should feel. What arrogance to suppose we are so ahead of other women, that our understanding is complete and theirs incomplete. How typically American to suppose that our present is everyone else's future. That all other women are going to have to hurry to catch up with us.



In beginning to assert myself as a woman in a male-defined world, i came through my feminine timidity to (at last) anger, fairly easily. It felt right - it was there, i was a woman who had been messed over; I had to stop making excuses for the men who had related to me only on their terms and taken my right to define myself. My realization of these feelings was a strengthening thing, but i was still confused as to who/what i was and what conditions of my life were the really important shapers of my politics. I continued to identify with rather simplistic definitions made by people who had power over me - influence on me - because they had the confidence (gall) to do that. I seemed to fit into a lot of convenient categories: ex-student, freak, starving artist, college graduate, acidhead, dropout. I knew these to be middle class trips, didn't see that it was just middle class people calling me one of them according to their rules. Being vaguely political before WL, i knew there were a lot of miserably oppressed people out there and felt guilty for being in my "privileged" position: a working class woman who had made it into middle class dropout land.

That kind of privilege was real vague; it didn't bring any material benefits, just frustration that, by definition, i was supposed to get security, money, confidence which i couldn't find. Those middle class people had only invited me to share their guilt, not their goods. Confronting myself with the realization that i had nothing to expect from participation in middle class games was a painful thing, though at least i could stop feeling that guilt. But my hurt didn't turn quickly to anger. I still felt intimidated by middle class women, couldn't confront them for that. Every time an eagerly articulate woman would interrupt and finish a sentence for me, i wanted to yell but ended up mumbling - couldn't shake the restraint of remembering how i'd done that same thing to other even more timid women. Working class women get indoctrinated with middle class shit and indoctrination means you act in support of your oppressors, act on their terms, against each other.

At least i know i've been indoctrinated and there was something else i would believe, the politics of my material experience, growing up in a hostile, financially insecure environment. There's a parallel in the heterosexual norm: heterosexuality has to be enforced - it's not "just natural", just what everyone would be. And people who know they don't fit into that ideology are not legitimized, are not allowed to influence this society. Working class people who resist indoctrination are also prevented from influencing society.

What this comes down to in my recent experiences, is that working class women who are still intimidated are forced to relate to middle class women on middle class terms because that is legitimized, because that is all middle class women understand. And middle class rap is big on "there has to be understanding."

I have read and heard their middle class ideology, but i don't know how it feels to have come to that ideology in experience. They don't understand my experience; i don't understand their blindness, their breezy, callous assumptions. I think i've found my angry voice but i feel pain for working class sisters who don't want me to get angry while they attempt to get across a watered-down (necessarily) version of their view, to middle class women. Those sisters' humility, self-sacrifice, patience and powerlessness makes me hate the women they attempt to work with. And i think that for reasons of survival and a sense of sisterhood, that working class women into WL will sometimes have to be working with women who can oppress them. I don't know the answers to end their frustration or my pain for them. Now it seems that middle class women have us divided on how to relate to their privileged demands! Working class sisters are beautiful and strong and their strength is getting wasted. I don't want us to get wasted but they don't want me to get angry. And my anger and my love for them is coming from the same place.

TWO RAPS ABOUT CLASS

The development of class-consciousness for the women's movement not only depends on middle-class women becoming aware of their class bias, but also depends on women from working class backgrounds who have identified with the middle class becoming class conscious.

Living in a small, isolated town can be deceiving as far as class goes. What was middle class in my community does not follow what is thought to be middle class in general. One example is education for women; most women got married within a year or two of high school graduation and had kids. A college education, since women weren't expected to have careers, was of little use. And the only "professions" visible were teaching and nursing, at that. I suppose that what I thought was upper class was really middle class, and what was seen as working class wasn't.

Although my family certainly wasn't, we always identified strongly with what the middle class does indeed value. Education was to enable us to get a good job, and for the females, to meet a husband, directly (while at school), or indirectly (at a job, etc.). While we wanted to live graciously, sometime, we were more interested in a nicer house and a car that wasn't falling apart.

We only knew that there was never enough money, actually that any major purchase was a trauma, and that we couldn't really consider nicer clothes, spending money, vacations, etc. We also knew that a large family spent a lot on food, without eating "well". It was clear we weren't social stars, but, the whole time, what we saw as middle class we said we didn't want - "everything they own is on their backs", real money spending, a new car every so often, house remodeling, lots of nice clothes, etc.

What we saw as working class were girls dropping out of school to get married, and then being stuck in that area, isolated, the guy not being able to get a good job, and being worried about money.

When we finally realized my dad had a blue collar job, we still called it a skilled blue-collar one. It was important for us to maintain the myth that the U.S. is basically middle class, or that if you weren't, it was a coincidence. While we faulted my dad for a lot, probably if we'd had a nicer house, newer car and nicer clothes, it wouldn't have made a difference. What we might have wondered then was why we still weren't acceptable.

I guess that's what I always wanted to be- acceptable. When I got into the women's movement and heard it called middle class for its goals - more high-paying jobs, liberalized abortion,etc. I didn't object to this indirect lable of myself as middle-class for two reasons. One is that it seemed like stuff that had been important to me might be brought within my reach. The second was that I was labeled middle class, or so I thought.

One thing I had never understood was that having a college degree didn't necessarily make me middle class, One job I might have had if I'd had the confidence to "sell" myself during the interview, I didn't get. I didn't think I was ever able to give employers what they wanted. Only once - I was asked if I would again do full-time volunteer work in a ghetto. That one I knew the answer to. So I said yes.

I do know that after I got married to a middle class man, I really tried to accept and understand, and never could, things like accepting gifts, and a close family. But I always thought it was my "warped" background that made me frustated and inwardly hostile.

I don't think I realize what being married, and to a middle class man, means. Financial security has got to be important to me, after wanting it so long. But family ties means I am offered much more than mere security. Being married itself brings a general form of approval, at least not suspicion.

I don't know what to say about now. Obviously.